

# Purpose-driven education system transformations

History Lessons from Korea and Japan

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# Meta Lessons

- WHY
  - Deeply felt national purpose
- HOW
  - Proactive, nuanced policy borrowing and adaptation

# Why Japan (1880-1930) and Korea (1945-1985)?

- Non-western educational “catch-up” transformation success stories:
  - RAPID: From relatively low % of literacy to high in ~40 years
  - QUALITY: Consistently top of international league tables
  - EQUAL: Tremendous within-country equality (in both achievement on international assessments and years of education)
- Intentional and purposive vs. evolutionary
- Explicitly borrowing, considering, explicitly rejecting

# Where are they now?

	TIMSS 2015 Gr 4 Maths	
	Average	Inequality Measure
Japan & Korea	600	.37
South Africa	376	.91
Indonesia	376	.75
Netherlands & Finland	530	.41

- +2 SDs above developing countries
- 0.7 SD above other developed countries
- Half the inequality of developing countries

## Purpose: response to external threats

- Japan emerged from the self-imposed isolation of the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) afraid of colonisation from the West, requiring rapid changes in military technology → industrialisation → education
- Korea emerged from similarly isolated Chosŏn period (1392-1897) with similar concerns, but educational transformation was interrupted by Japanese colonisation (1910-1945), which created pent-up demand for quality, egalitarian education

# Purpose: education for emergent national identity

- Education – and the equality of its provision – played a role in emergent national identity
- Appreciated as a nation-building goal in itself, rather than just a lever to improve other (health, economic) outcomes
- Language in foundational documents was strong, moving, beautiful, inspiring

## Purpose: deep ownership as a manifestation of own-purpose

- Donor influence in Korea and Japan only after WWII
- Deep questioning of borrowed policies in both cases
  - Japan: Journals and educational associations
  - Korea: KEDI, Florida State University
- Deep ownership not because it is “good development practice” but as arising from being purpose-driven

## HOW: Policy Borrowing Missions

Japan: Iwakura Mission (1871-1873)	Korea: Bobingsa (1883)
United States & Europe	United States

- Proactive education policy borrowing at the beginning of transformation periods
- Reflective, iterative, contextualised, included educators in the process
- Borrowed *means*, not *purpose*
- **Later periods of occupation and externally-driven reforms were thus met with an institutional memory of careful adaptation, rather than wholesale “cargo cult” (Cowen 2000) adoption**



# Developing countries (Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe as proxies)

Most African countries started out purpose-driven (but less than Japan and Korea) in early post-independence eras. What happened?

- Donor-driven policies
  - Bilaterals fragmented goals (girls, foundational learning)
  - Quantitative targets (Addis Ababa targets, MDGs, SDGs) became the “thing in itself” rather than as proxies or signposts for broader purposes
- Within-government policies
  - Disconnect between leaders’ speeches and policies
  - Focus on national purpose narrowed to economic growth
  - Supremacy of manpower planning surveys for educational planning

# Policy Borrowing Framework

To compare the WHY and the HOW of Japan and Korea's educational transformations to countries like Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, we formulated a series of questions to analyze:

- 1) A country's engagement with purpose, and
- 2) whether policies are borrowed in a manner that remains true to that purpose

# How to tell whether purpose is engaged?

- Who is engaged in defining the direction of an education sector?
- What does the process of policy borrowing look like?
- Where does the impetus for engagement with new ideas come from?
- How much does the process engage with whether actions are feasible on the ground, and can be related to results?
  - Is there genuine accountability to the “purpose holders”?

# Borrowing Framework: Substantive Issues

1. Are policies being borrowed from the right place?
2. How tied are the policies being borrowed to the historical sociology and politics of the originating country?
3. Is the borrowing motivation deeply in line with education system improvement goals?
4. How much questioning and adaptation can be done, or has been done?
5. Is the borrowing sincere, or “isomorphic mimicry” (Pritchett 2011)?

# Borrowing Framework: Policy Marketing Issues

1. Whose impulse drove the borrowing?
2. What is the policy lender's agenda?

# Lessons for current education aid policy environment

1. An ed system's purpose must be agreed at the outset
2. Policy borrowing is a necessarily contested process of adaptation and iteration
3. Borrow the means, not the purpose
4. Numerical indicators are useful, but they do not comprise purpose

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# Annexes



# Pedagogical policy lessons

- As noted, foundation first
- Centralization of goals and macro process, decentralization (to teacher) of means
- Tons of in-service, coaching and mutual coaching
- All can learn, intelligence and talent matter way less than hard work and good teaching
- Large class sizes; heavy double-shifting (in initial period)
- Teachers very secure (and well-trained), well-paid, in exchange for hard work
- Teachers visit home of each child at beginning
- Imp. role of private sector, both schools and tutoring (varies Japan vs Korea)
- Whole-group teaching-at-the-right level, not individual
  - Demanding curriculum but catch up provided first, in grade 1
- Order in classroom, 240 days of schooling, extremely low absenteeism: no time lost, huge time on task, group and collective orientation but individual responses, egalitarian
- Structured, scripted\*, teacher-centered, yet interactive (1 response per child / hour!), textbook-based
- Mastery-based: everyone moves together once mastery is achieved by all (really, most) in Grade 1; seems there is less dispersion in Grade 3 than in Grade 1
- Moral and character as important and cleverly and purposively done
  - (Can have down side—militarism up to 1940 and upside—humanism after 1945)
  - Westerners: it is the culture that makes ed achievement possible or is it educational achievement that makes the culture possible?

\*In the sense of strict and well-thought out scope and sequence and lesson outline

# Caveats (and caveats to the caveats)

But aren't Japanese and Korean kids stressed to the max?

- Perhaps, but where is the “real” evidence?

But aren't Korean and Japanese kids rote-learning automata?

- If so, why do ratings agencies regularly rate Korean and Japanese companies as at the top of innovation league tables?  
Way above most of Europe, Finland, etc.

	Mental Health		
	Suicide	Anxiety	Dep.
Japan & Korea	13.4 / 100k	4.0%	1.7%
Western Compar.	13.5 / 100k	5.8%	4.0%